



Rosh Hodesh Sh'vat

Tuesday, January 28, 2025 @ 5:30 pm

Program Facilitator: Judith Axler

Agenda

Introductions and Opening Blessing	Page 2
About Sh'vat	Page 3
Tradition and Trees — Responsive Reading	Page 4
Breakout Discussions	Page 5
Suggested Actions	Page 6
Proverbs 3:16-18	Page 7
Advice from a Tree	Page 8
Etz <u>H</u> ayim Hi	Page 9



Introductions and Opening Blessing

Introduce yourself! We invite you to use your first name and your mother's first name. It doesn't matter if your mother isn't/wasn't Jewish.

Blessing:

Commentary by LilyFish Gomberg:

The reference to children in the blessing can apply to biological or adopted children, and it can also apply to anyone we nurture and teach within the community, the next generation of Jews we collectively hope to inspire.

The prayer is intended to be inclusive, speaking to our shared responsibility in helping to shape the future of the Jewish community.

In Sanhedrin 99b, Reish Lakish says, "Anyone who teaches someone else's child Torah is regarded by the Torah as though they have made them." R. Elazar adds that it is as though the teacher has "made" the child in terms of Torah, highlighting the importance of the role of teaching and mentorship in Jewish life.

May it be Your will, my God and God of my ancestors, to be gracious to me and to all my family and to give us, and all Israel, a good and long life. Remember us with goodness and blessing, and grant us salvation and mercy. Grant us abundant blessing, and fortify the places we call home. May Your Presence dwell among us as we gather here today. May we be blessed with wise and learned disciples and children, lovers of God who stand in awe of You, people who speak truth and spread holiness. May those we nurture light the world with Torah and good deeds.

Hear the prayers I utter now in the name of our mothers Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah. May Your light, reflected in these candles, surround us always. And let us say, Amen.

About Sh'vat

The month of Sh'vat is known mostly because of the holiday Tu BiSh'vat. However, according to tradition, it's also the month when Moses, preparing for his death, gathered the Israelites and began the 37-day "review of the Torah" contained in the Book of Deuteronomy, which he concluded on the day he died on the 7th of Adar.

Tu BiSh'vat falls on the 15th day of the month. The "Tu" is an abbreviation for 15 - the tet (nine) and vav (six), used to make up the "Tu" in Tu BiSh'vat, have a combined numerical value of 15 (*hamesh-esreh* in Hebrew).

The Torah is referred to as *Etz Hayim* – the Tree of Life – and is filled with references to trees, beginning with the Tree of Knowledge between Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden, all the way through to Deuteronomy's injunction against destroying fruit trees in times of war.

Tu BiSh'vat is first mentioned in the Mishnah. There, the text speaks of four different new years. One of them was Tu BiSh'vat – the New Year of Trees.

Each year, the Israelites were expected to bring one-tenth (a "tithe") of their fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem, where they were offered to God and also helped sustain the priestly class and the poor. Since fruit from one year could not be used to tithe for another, the Rabbis had to determine when a crop year would begin and end. They chose the month of Sh'vat as the cut-off date, for this is when, in Israel, the sap begins to run and the trees start to awaken from their winter slumber, before beginning to bear fruit. Thus, the New Year of Trees.

The astrological sign for the month of Sh'vat is Aquarius, the water bearer. This further ties Sh'vat to the rainy season in Israel.

טו בי שבט



Read Responsively:

"Like the days of a tree, shall be the days of my people" (Isaiah 65:22)

"And God said: Let the earth put forth grass, herb yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after its kind ... And it was so ... And God saw that it was good." (Genesis 1:11-12)

"When a tree is wantonly cut down, its voice rings from one end of the earth to another." (Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer 43)

"When you besiege a city, do not destroy the trees thereof. You may eat of them but you must not cut them down." (Deuteronomy 20:19)

"A person's life is sustained by trees. Just as others planted for you, plant for the sake of your children." (Midrash Tanchuma Kedoshim 8)

"If you had a sapling in your hand and were told that the Messiah had come, first plant the sapling, then go out to greet the Messiah." (Midrash Avot Derabbi Natan 8,31)

"Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat the fruit of them." (Jeremiah 29:5)

"You shall be like a tree planted beside a river; that brings forth its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither; and whatsoever you do shall prosper." (after Psalms 1:3)

"Zion shall no more be termed forsaken; neither shall the land be termed desolate any more." (Isaiah 62:4)

"For the pastures of the wilderness are green with grass, the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength." (Joel 2:22)

(Compiled in *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages and Personal Milestones* edited by Rabbi Debra Orenstein (Woodstock, VT; Jewish Lights, 1994), pp. 79-82)

Discussion Topics – Four Questions for Tu BiSh'vat

Next, we will break into four small groups. Each group will discuss one topic (15 minutes) and will report out to the larger group.

Tu BiSh'vat reminds us that as a people, we are charged with caring for and nurturing the environment. This resonates for many women, because we are often expected to fulfill the role of “nurturer” in our families and relationships.

Tu BiSh'vat also comes at the time when the first signs of spring are taking place in Israel. Here in the USA, it is still winter in many places. We see the trees bare and without leaves. They look dead on the outside. It can be hard in the middle of winter to remember the beauty and shade that a tree can provide. But down in the ground, their roots are busy preparing for spring. This reminds us of the change of the seasons and the importance of making sure we rest and nurture ourselves for the challenges of the next “season” in our lives.

- 1. How do we feel about the nurturer role women are often expected to play?** Is this a burden for you or something you find fulfilling? Do you think this expectation had an impact on choices you made in your life?
- 2. What do you do to nurture yourself in the midst of winter?** How can you carve out space in your life to nurture yourself from season to season?
- 3. Why do we judge things based on their outside appearance?** As women, do you feel you are judged by how you look on the outside rather than what is going on inside? How can we combat societal expectations about our outside appearance?
- 4. Women go through many changes in their bodies throughout their lives.** “The change” is a euphemism for menopause. How can older women help younger women understand and prepare for this change? Why don't we as women talk more about the changes in our bodies as we move through the different seasons of our lives?

Here are some suggested actions we can explore to do our part to take care of the Earth:

- If you live in a townhouse, you can try to plant flowers and shrubs that help the environment. For example, in Center City West, we are working with the Southwest Center City group to expand the pollinator pathway in Center City. The purpose is to encourage planting of shrubs that provide nutrition and habitat for pollinating insects and birds. (www.pollinator-pathway.org/towns/southwest-center-city-philadelphia)
- Storm drain marking reminds people not to put pesticides or other chemicals in the storm drains, which result in polluting either the Schuylkill or Delaware Rivers. This a fun activity to do with kids. (<https://markingapp.philadelphiawater.org/>)
- Check out your neighborhood association or the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to see what they are doing about environmental issues.



Proverbs 3:13-18

Translation from Etz Hayim

Happy is the person who finds wisdom,
the one who attains understanding.

Its value in trade is better than silver,
its yield greater than gold.

It is more precious than rubies;
all of your goods cannot equal it.

In its right hand is length of days,
in its left, riches and honor.

Its ways are pleasant ways,
and all its paths, peaceful.

It is a tree of life to those who grasp it,
and whoever holds on to it is happy.

Advice from a Tree
by Ilan Shamir

Dear Friend,
Stand Tall and Proud
Sink your roots deeply into the Earth
Reflect the light of a greater source
Think long term
Go out on a limb
Remember your place among all living beings
Embrace with joy the changing seasons
For each yields its own abundance
The Energy and Birth of Spring
The Growth and Contentment of Summer
The Wisdom to let go of leaves in the Fall
The Rest and Quiet Renewal of Winter
Feel the wind and the sun
And delight in their presence
Look up at the moon that shines down upon you
And the mystery of the stars at night.
Seek nourishment from the good things in life
Simple pleasures
Earth, fresh air, light
Be content with your natural beauty
Drink plenty of water
Let your limbs sway and dance in the breezes
Be flexible
Remember your roots
Enjoy the view!

Etz Hayim Hi

*Etz hayim hi lamahhazikim bah,
V'tomkhehah me'ushar:*

עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה
ותומכיה מאשר:

*D'rakhehah darkhei no'am v'khol
netivotehah shalom*

דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל
נתיבותיה שלום

*Hashivenu Adonai elekha v'nashuvah
hadesh yameinu k'kedem*

השיבנו יהוה אליך ונשובה
חדש ימינו כקדם

*It is a tree of life to those who grasp it,
and all who uphold it are blessed.*

*Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all
its paths are peace.*

*Cause us to return to you, Adonai, and we shall
return; renew our days as of old.*

Coming up at Society Hill Synagogue:

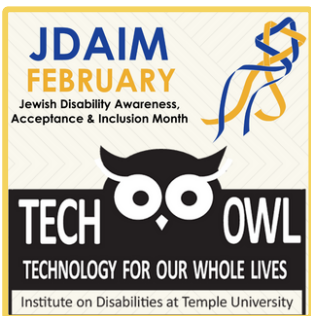


How-To with Hazzan Jessi: Saturday Morning Davening

Monday, Feb. 3 @ 7:30 pm

Curious about what's happening during prayer at services? Join **Hazzan Jessi** for part one of this special workshop exploring the origins and choreography of the Shabbat Morning Service. Whether you're new to Jewish prayer or looking to deepen your understanding, this session will guide you through the rituals and meaning of Shabbat prayer. *The Part Two of this workshop will be on Monday, March 3, at 7:30 pm.*

societyhillsynagogue.org/adult-education/enroll



Inclusion Committee Sunday Brunch 'n' Learn – Technology for Our Lives

Sunday, Feb. 9 @ 10:00 am - Noon

Our community celebrates Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month (JDAIM), an annual reminder each February to actively engage in education around disability.

Join us for a presentation by **TechOWL – Technology for Our Whole Lives** about tools that can help people with disabilities do the things they want to do (or do those things more easily) and explore options for living and learning. Learn about ways to try, borrow, and “recycle” assistive technology. Some devices will be available on site for hands-on exploration.

This Brunch 'n' Learn is generously sponsored by Debbie Stewart.

societyhillsynagogue.org/jdaim2025



Moving Traditions – Tzelem

Do you know a Jewish teen (grades 7-12) who identifies as LGBTQ+, or as an ally? Tzelem is a social and educational group connecting teens through queer identities and Jewish traditions, discussing topics like mental health, relationships, self-compassion, and more.

Meetings are held monthly, beginning in March. For more info, contact Galia Godel at ggodel@jfcshilly.org.

SONGS FROM THE VOID

SATURDAY, MARCH 1 @ 7:45 PM

SOCIETY HILL SYNAGOGUE

418 Spruce Street, Philadelphia

Join us for an evening of new Jewish music, mysticism, and mishegas with Darshan

Darshan is a collaboration between world-soul superstar **Basya Schechter** (Pharaoh's Daughter) and polymathic poet and rapper **Eden Pearlstein** (ePRHYME). Blending **poetic rap commentary** and **musical midrash**, Darshan breathes new life into ancient Hebrew and Aramaic texts — sampling, remixing, and creatively transforming **mystical Jewish teachings and prayers** into a truly unique form of **Sacred Pop Art**.

CONNECT. REFLECT. GROOVE.

Darshan will share songs from its first album, **RAZA**, a radical reimagining of the mystical poetry of Kabbalat Shabbat, and from its upcoming album, **SONGS FROM THE VOID**, inspired by the paradigm-shifting teachings of **Rebbe Nachman of Breslov**.

GET YOUR TICKETS TODAY!

Free for Society Hill Synagogue Members

Advance Tickets: \$25 General Admission • \$18 Student

\$30 at the Door

SOCIETYHILLSYNAGOGUE.ORG/DARSHAN



SOCIETY HILL
SYNAGOGUE

DARSHAN



